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Allies Cited for Human Trafficking

State Dept. Adds Arab Nations to List of Worst Offenders

By NORA BOUSTANY
Washington Post Foreign Service

The State Department yesterday added seven countries, including four Arab allies, to its list of worst offenders in failing to suppress human trafficking and forced labor, which it called "a modern day form of slavery."

The 236-page annual survey, now in its seventh year, added Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar to its blacklist of worst offenders, along with Algeria, Equatorial Guinea and Malaysia. Countries on the list are subject to sanctions until major reforms are introduced.

The list already included Burma, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Uzbekistan and Venezuela. Laos, Belize and Zimbabwe were dropped from the list this year.

The world's two most populous countries, China and India, were kept on an intermediate watch list, meaning their approach to trafficking is deemed deficient but not enough to face immediate U.S. sanctions.

Rep. Christopher H. Smith (R-N.J.), who sponsored the law that requires the report, contended that this year's survey was too soft on China and India. In his view, they should have been placed on the list of worst offenders.

The study documents efforts by foreign governments to prevent the trafficking of people for sexual exploitation and forced labor. It looks at whether the countries prosecute traffickers and try to protect the most vulnerable people, such as women and



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children.

It sets up a three-tier evaluation system, with the worst cases ranked in tier three and subject to immediate sanctions such as the prohibition of grants or sale of security items. A grace period of several months is granted to countries in the second tier watch list to give them time to introduce reforms. The president is allowed to waive sanctions.

The Arab countries received the bottom ranking in part because many of the foreign workers who keep their infrastructures running are mistreated. Sex trafficking from Balkan nations and former Soviet republics is also common in Arab countries where custom prohibits prostitution among local women.

Smith said that "India in particular, and China, ought to be tier three countries." In previous years, he said, countries such as Greece, Turkey, Israel and South

Korea were placed in tier three. "As soon as they got placed in that category, the governments there closed brothels, arrested go-betweens and liberated women," Smith added.

The report says that 90 percent of India's trafficking occurs inside the country, as opposed to across its national borders, and that girls as young as 13 are being forced into sexual slavery.

Smith said that "even the narrative in the report is contrary to the placement" of India. He said he believed India was put on the watch list only so that the United States could avoid imposing penalties.

He noted that in China, a strict one-child policy results in the aborting of female fetuses. By 2020, he said, 40 million men will not be able to find wives, "creating a huge magnet for trafficking."

"The tier two watch list should not be a parking lot where countries remain. There should be pressure on them," Mark P. Lagon, the newly appointed director of the State Department's office to monitor and combat trafficking in persons, said while releasing the report yesterday morning. "In the case of India, we are going to work seriously in looking at the record to see whether it deserves reassessment down the road."

Human trafficking undermines any pretension that a country is democratic, Lagon said. "If people are treated as if they are subhuman and can be enslaved, the government is not fully living up to its democratic principles," he said.

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